



## **Internal Security Fund (ISF)**

### **Call for proposals**

Call for proposals on the Protection of Public Spaces (including places of worship, CBRN, countering non-cooperative drones, firearms trafficking and explosives detection dogs)

(ISF-2024-TF2-AG-PROTECT)

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
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## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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## 0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of protection of public spaces under the **Internal Security Fund (ISF)**.

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- The basic act (ISF Regulation (EU) 2021/1149<sup>1</sup>).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023-2025 Thematic Facility Work Programme<sup>2</sup> and will be managed by the **European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)**.

The call covers five topics:

- Protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings
- Protection of Jewish places of worship, schools, and community gatherings
- Protection against chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) threats in public spaces
- Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms
- Protection against explosives threats with detection dogs
- Protection against potential threats posed by non-cooperative drones

Each project application under this call must address **one topic** only. Applicants wishing to apply for more than one topic must submit a separate proposal under each topic.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#) and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
  - background, objectives, themes and priorities, scope, activities that can be funded and outcomes, the expected results and impact (sections 1 and 2)
  - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
  - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
  - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
  - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
  - award criteria (section 9)

<sup>1</sup> REGULATION (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Internal Security Fund (OJ L 251, 15.7.2021, p. 94).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Decision C(2022) 8334 final of 23 November 2022 on the financing of components of the Thematic Facility under the Internal Security Fund and adoption of the Work Programme for 2023, 2024 and 2025. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/internal-security-funds/internal-security-fund-2021-2027\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/internal-security-funds/internal-security-fund-2021-2027_en).

- legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
- the Online Manual outlines the:
  - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
  - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
  - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc.*).

## 1. Background

Public spaces in the EU, such as places of worship, shopping malls, public transportation, or entertainment venues, have become the target of terrorist attacks. These spaces are especially vulnerable due to their high accessibility and the anonymity of visitors. To support Member States in better protecting their citizens and their public spaces against terrorist threats, the EU has adopted different measures to facilitate cross-country network-building, to encourage cross-border and public-private cooperation, to organise joint trainings and to promote closer coordination. In this context, the Commission funds projects that have an EU added value and which aim at increasing the protection of public spaces. Activities funded under the ISF Thematic Facility 2023-2025 in this policy area should aim at protecting people in public spaces, which involves the protection of places of worship, protection against CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear) threats and against non-cooperative unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) commonly known as "drones" and countering the illicit use of explosives and firearms. The objectives of these activities are to improve more broadly the protection of public spaces. That could mean the physical protection but also preventing terrorist attacks (e.g., through better public-private cooperation or other measures in line with the Commission Staff Working Document 'Good practices to support the protection of public spaces<sup>3</sup>'), improving the detection of CBRN and explosives threats for different types of public spaces and critical infrastructures, and enhancing the capacities of Member States to deal with the threats posed by non-cooperative UAS.

The protection of public places, including among others places of worship, is crucial, as reconfirmed by the surge of antisemitic incidents across the European Union, following the unprecedented terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel in early October 2023. Violent criminal attacks on the Jewish community have acted as a shocking reminder that we can never be complacent about the resurgence of hatred. Antisemitism is incompatible with all the European Union stands for. It is incompatible with human rights, with our values and with our European way of life. In the aftermath of the crisis in the Middle East, there have been alarming increases in hate speech and hate crime, not only towards the Jewish but also the Muslim communities. That is why the Commission, together with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, recently put forward a Joint Communication that steps up efforts to tackle hatred in all its forms in the European Union. "No place for hate: a Europe

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<sup>3</sup> [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Good practices to support the protection of public spaces Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council Eighteenth Progress Report towards an effective and genuine Security Union - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

united against hatred”<sup>4</sup>, is a call for action on all Europeans, Institutions, countries, and civil society organizations to ensure that Europe is a place where our founding values are enjoyed by everyone, on an equal basis.

Already in 2017, the European Commission adopted the Action Plan for the Protection of Public Spaces<sup>5</sup>, and on 9 December 2020, building on it, the Commission presented a new EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda for 2020 to 2025<sup>6</sup> in which it commits to focus on priority areas where the EU can bring an added value in support of the Member States efforts to increase security in Europe. The ‘protect’ strand of the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda focuses on the protection of public spaces, including places of worship of all faiths, which are recognised as holding a particularly high symbolic value and have been frequently targeted by terrorists. While freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right tenaciously protected in the EU by legal instruments at the level of international<sup>7</sup>, European<sup>8</sup> and individual Member State law, attacks on people exercising this very right in churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship continue to occur with dreadful consistency across Europe. Therefore, the Commission services consider it a priority to strengthen their protection by fostering cooperation between the different faith communities and with relevant national authorities, and by supporting projects that enhance their physical protection. When it comes to the protection of Jewish communities in Europe, another key step taken by the Commission is the adoption, in October 2021, of the EU Strategy on Combating Anti-Semitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030)<sup>9</sup>. The EU Security Union Strategy<sup>10</sup> is another important document that defines, for the period 2020 to 2025, the main priority areas where the EU can bring value to support Member States in fostering security for all those living in Europe. The section “A Future Proof Security Environment” stresses the importance of protecting public spaces, including places of worship.

The 2017 Action Plan to enhance preparedness against CBRN security risks<sup>11</sup> remains the key policy document in the CBRN security area. The overall goal of the Action Plan is to improve all Member States capabilities in the CBRN area, by reducing the accessibility of CBRN materials, by boosting preparedness and response to security incidents, by building stronger links with key international and regional partners (the US, NATO, Interpol, and IAEA) and by exchanging knowledge of CBRN risks at EU level. In line with the overall trends, the CBRN terrorist threat remains the highest in public spaces. In response to this situation in the past few years, the Commission has supported several projects addressing this threat. These covered areas such as shopping malls or sport arenas. Many places of mass gatherings – including places of worship – remain, however, vulnerable.

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<sup>4</sup> JOIN(2023) 51 final

<sup>5</sup> COM(2017) 612 final

<sup>6</sup> [COM/2020/795 final](#)

<sup>7</sup> Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

<sup>8</sup> Article 10 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), Article 21 (non-discrimination) and Article 22 (religious diversity) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights

<sup>9</sup> [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0615 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [EUR-Lex - 52020DC0605 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [COM\(2017\) 610 final](#)

Illicit firearms and other small arms and light weapons (SALW) continue to contribute to instability and violence in the EU, in its immediate neighbourhood, and in the rest of the world. Illicit weapons are fuelling global terrorism and conflicts, thwarting the EU's development and crisis-management, humanitarian, and stabilisation efforts in parts of the EU's neighbourhood and Africa. Within the EU, illicit firearms have a clear impact on internal security by fuelling organised crime and providing terrorists with means to carry out attacks on European soil.

In 2018, the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on "Elements towards an EU Strategy against illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons and their Ammunition"<sup>12</sup> was endorsed by the Council, turning it into a fully-fledge EU Strategy.<sup>13</sup>

The misuse and trafficking of firearms and SALW is a priority for the EU, included in the current EU Security Union Strategy<sup>14</sup> with a specific EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking for the period 2020-2025 that covers both the EU and South-eastern Europe<sup>15</sup>. Threats posed by firearms misuse and trafficking are part of the Counter-Terrorism Agenda as well, which outlines a number of measures to be implemented to reduce the means to attack for terrorists, and to reinforce the international cooperation across all four pillars of the Agenda.

Also, as a result of the actions outlined in the EU Counter Terrorism Agenda, the European Commission launched an initiative to enhance the performance of security detection equipment<sup>16</sup>, including detection dogs used in different public spaces. The lack of harmonization in the existing detection performance standards of security equipment and detection dog teams has a negative impact on the detection of explosive threats and security provided to citizens. The EU mandatory standards for explosive detection dogs are only established in the field of aviation security (Regulation 300/2008<sup>17</sup>) and only a few Member States have established detection standards for detection dogs used in public spaces security, thus leaving a gap in detection capabilities. Therefore, to support Member States' authorities to set national standards for detection dogs and other security equipment, the Commission has proposed the development of voluntary technical standards.

Furthermore, the EU addressed the possible threats posed by drones in the framework of the EU Security Union Strategy and the Counter-Terrorism Agenda, specifically mentioning support activities for Member States. Up until now, the EU has not suffered a major attack making use of a drone, but the rapidly advancing capabilities of drones present a growing security risk. In recent years, plans have been uncovered to make use of drones for terrorist purposes in the EU. Moreover, the use of drones designed for civil applications in war and armed conflict such as in Ukraine and in the Middle East, further underlines their potential harmful use. To address such challenges and further support Member States, the EU has adopted a Communication on countering potential threats posed by drones<sup>18</sup>, which sets out the

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<sup>12</sup> JOIN (2018) 17 final, 1.06.2018.

<sup>13</sup> Council conclusions of 19 November 2018 – Document 13581/18.

<sup>14</sup> [EU Security Union Strategy](#)

<sup>15</sup> [2020-2025 EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking](#)

<sup>16</sup> The Commission is working together with the private sector to improve the performance of such detection technologies outside aviation with a view to support the possible development of voluntary EU requirements for detection technologies.

<sup>17</sup> [EUR-Lex - 32008R0300 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> [COM COM\(2023\)0659 EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

EU's policy on countering the potential threats from non-cooperative UAS. The Communication was announced as a flagship action in the Drone 2.0 Strategy<sup>19</sup> that the Commission published in November 2022 and forms the umbrella for a wider counter-drone package, which is complemented by two handbooks with practical guidance of the Joint Research Centre (JRC)<sup>20</sup>. The Communication describes the need to act against the threat posed by drones which is accelerated by their rapidly growing number and enhancing abilities. It outlines a set of key actions, which are based on already existing work strands undertaken by DG HOME and other Commission services. The activities are clustered into six pillars: Community Building & Information Sharing; Counter Drone Systems Testing; Practical Guidance and Operational Support; Research and Innovation; Funding Support, Regulatory Measures. The activities outlined in this Communication will cover the period until 2030.

## **2. Objectives — Scope — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact**

The following topics are aimed at supporting the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda and the above-mentioned EU strategic documents.

### **Protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings**

Building a solid cooperation and communication between public authorities, law enforcement agencies and religious institutions and faith community leaders is key in the context of this topic. Awareness-raising is another imperative factor in the protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings. Religious communities must be informed of ways to detect threats, report suspicious behaviour, notice signs of potential attacks, and learn how to respond to them. Schemes like "Run-Hide-Tell" provide them with a straightforward message for an immediate response in case of an incident. Infographic material, advertisements and public information campaigns are also effective means to raise awareness. Similarly, communication and collaboration among different religious communities can provide invaluable exchange of best practices and lessons learned, so a multi-faith approach is also an essential requirement of this topic.

#### Objectives

The present topic within this call aims at enhancing the protection of places of worship of all faiths. Educational institutions, as well as places of community gathering that are visibly associated with a religious faith, also hold a symbolic value, and face similar threats, hence they are also included in this call.

#### Scope - activities and outcomes

Proposals submitted under this topic must carry out at least one of the following activities:

- **Establishing or stepping up cooperation between public authorities and faith-based leaders and congregations**, including establishing clear communication channels and providing information about, and a better understanding of, security threats (including terrorist threats and hate crimes).
- **Designing and implementing security awareness raising campaigns specifically targeting places of worship**, preferably on an EU-wide basis,

<sup>19</sup> [COM\\_2022\\_652\\_drone\\_strategy\\_2.0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Protection against Unmanned Aircraft Systems: Handbook on UAS protection of Critical Infrastructure and Public Space - A five Phase approach for C-UAS stakeholders](#)

to make citizens more aware of threats, encourage them to report suspicious behaviours and promote an appropriate response to threats (e.g., "RUN-HIDE-TELL", "See Something, Say Something" or similar models). Infographic material, advertisements and public information campaigns are also effective means to raise awareness; transmitted messages need to avoid being confusing, ambiguous, or contradicting to other ongoing campaigns.

- **Sharing of knowledge, tools, and good practices on protective measures** across different Member States, and between different faiths. It is particularly relevant the exchanges between those Member States with a wider experience in protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings and those with less experience, in a cascading effect that would maximize efforts.
- **Development and implementation of security concepts, measures, programs, and communication plans**; security plans are to be developed in collaboration among religious leaders and security operators or law enforcement agencies.
- **Development and implementation of trainings** for public authorities, faith-based leaders and congregations, and members of the communities.

#### Expected impact

Proposals are expected to support the Commission and the Member States in addressing current, emerging and future threats regarding the protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings.

Proposals are expected to contribute to increasing the perception and the feeling of security and safety of the targeted religious communities, through the establishment of communication channels, communication plans, tools, mechanisms, guidance materials, and good practices for stakeholders involved in the protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings.

Awareness raising efforts, including dissemination of communication materials, should result in a rising number of community members and stakeholders becoming aware of security threats and better equipped to prevent and react to them.

#### Additional considerations applicable to this topic

In this context, places of worship include all buildings and places where people of religious organisations congregate. Schools and community gatherings include all educational institutions, as well as places of gathering that are visibly associated with a religious faith.

Proposals under this topic that have a multi-faith approach, i.e. project activities/outcomes may be applicable to as many religious communities as possible, will be deemed particularly relevant. This means that proposals targeting at least two different religious communities, either by having them as consortium members or as participants in project activities, will be considered particularly relevant.

Security awareness raising campaigns targeting places of worship, schools and community gatherings shall be embedded in a solid communication strategy, based on a well-defined methodology acknowledging the specificities of the messages to be passed.

## **Protection of Jewish places of worship, schools and community gatherings**

Places of worship, schools and community gatherings associated with the Jewish faith in the EU face a complex range of threats today, and preparedness and resilience are key aspects to ensure their protection. Developing collaboration and communication between public authorities, law enforcement agencies and Jewish faith institutions and Jewish faith community leaders is essential in the context of this topic. Awareness-raising is another imperative factor in the protection of places of worship, schools and community gatherings visibly associated with the Jewish faith, as Jewish communities must be informed of avenues to identify threats, report suspicious behaviour, notice signs of potential attacks, and learn how to respond to them. Infographic material, advertisements and public information campaigns are also effective means to raise awareness.

### Objectives

The present topic within this call aims at enhancing the protection of places of worship, schools and community gatherings visibly associated with the Jewish faith.

### Scope - activities and outcomes

Proposals submitted under this topic must carry out at least one of the following activities:

- **Establishing or stepping up cooperation between public authorities and Jewish faith-based leaders and congregations**, including establishing clear communication channels and providing information about, and a better understanding of, security threats (including terrorist threats and hate crimes).
- **Designing and implementing security awareness raising campaigns specifically targeting Jewish places of worship**, preferably on an EU-wide basis, to make citizens more aware of threats, encourage them to report suspicious behaviours and promote an appropriate response to threats (e.g., "RUN-HIDE-TELL", "See Something, Say Something" or similar models). Infographic material, advertisements and public information campaigns are also effective means to raise awareness; transmitted messages need to avoid being confusing, ambiguous, or contradicting to other ongoing campaigns.
- **Sharing of knowledge, tools, and good practices on protective measures** across different Member States. It is particularly relevant the exchanges between those Member States with a wider experience in protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings and those with less experience, in a cascading effect that would maximize efforts.
- **Development and implementation of security concepts, measures, programs, and communication plans**; security plans are to be developed in collaboration among religious leaders and security operators or law enforcement agencies.
- **Development and implementation of trainings** for public authorities, Jewish faith-based leaders and congregations, and members of the Jewish communities.

### Expected impact

Proposals are expected to support the Commission and the Member States in addressing current, emerging and future threats regarding the protection of Jewish places of worship.

Proposals are expected to contribute to increasing the perception and the feeling of security and safety of Jewish religious communities, through the establishment of communication channels, communication plans, tools, mechanisms, guidance materials, and good practices for stakeholders involved in the protection of Jewish places of worship.

Awareness raising efforts, including dissemination of communication materials, should result in a rising number of community members and stakeholders becoming aware of security threats and better equipped to prevent and react to them.

#### *Additional considerations applicable to this topic*

In this context, Jewish places of worship include all buildings and places where people of Jewish religious organisations congregate. Schools and community gatherings include all educational institutions, as well as places of gathering that are visibly associated with the Jewish faith.

Security awareness raising campaigns targeting Jewish places of worship, schools and community gatherings visibly associated with the Jewish faith shall be embedded in a solid communication strategy, based on a well-defined methodology acknowledging the specificities of the messages to be passed.

### **Protection against CBRN threats in public spaces**

#### *Objectives*

The objective of this topic is to enhance the protection against and detection of CBRN threats for different types of public spaces and critical infrastructures.

#### *Scope - activities and outcomes*

Proposals submitted under the present topic must undertake at least one of the following activities (in cooperation with operators):

- **Development of guidance materials** on better protection against and detection of CBRN threats, for different types of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures.
- **Development and implementation of security concepts, measures, and programs** for different types of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures.
- **Development and implementation of trainings** on better protection against and detection of CBRN threats, for different types of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures.

#### *Expected impact*

The expected impact is the enhancement of the overall protection of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures by improving cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, raising awareness about CBRN threats, developing trainings and guidance materials, providing better assessment of security threats, better planning of protective measures and enhanced physical protection.

#### *Additional considerations applicable to this topic*

Proposals submitted by consortia that include all the following target groups will be considered particularly relevant: law enforcement agencies and operators of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures.

Similarly, proposals putting forward innovative approaches to protection of public spaces and/or critical infrastructures will be deemed more relevant as well.

These considerations will be taken into account during the assessment of the relevance criterion.

## **Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms**

The topic of firearms has two dimensions, as a legal and illegal good. The Firearms Directive<sup>21</sup> sets common minimum standards on the acquisition, possession, and commercial exchange of civilian firearms (e.g., firearms used for sport shooting, hunting, collecting, etc.) within the EU. This helps to balance internal market objectives (i.e., the cross-border movement of firearms) and security policy objectives (i.e., the high level of security and protection against criminal acts and illicit trafficking).

The last revision of the Firearms Directive in 2017<sup>22</sup> focused on the better control of acquisition and possession of weapons to prevent criminals and terrorists from accessing the most dangerous military-grade weapons. The legislation includes provisions to improve information sharing, to reinforce traceability, to standardise marking, and to establish common standards for deactivated firearms.

The different sections of the topic on firearms have as framework the priorities of the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking and the goals of the European Multi-disciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) firearms.

### Objectives

The goal of this topic is to support the Commission in fulfilling the objectives of the 2020-2025 EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking:

**Objective 1: Safeguarding the legal market and limiting diversion**, through a better understanding of current, emerging, and future threats and through developments to increase the effectiveness of the Firearms Directive.

**Objective 2: Building a better intelligence picture and further developing knowledge of threats** by increasing the information available at EU level of incidents where firearms are involved, such as gun incidents or seizures of firearms.

**Objective 3: Stepping up law enforcement to increase pressure on criminal markets** by developing new technologies, reinforcing tools, such as ballistic systems, and mechanisms available, and notably by establishing fully functional national firearms focal points as entities in the Member States and in non-EU countries of interest<sup>23</sup>, in line with the Council Conclusions on the implementation of the National Firearms Focal Points (NFFPs) of July 2021<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Directive (EU) 2021/555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (codification) (OJ L 115, 6.4.2021, p. 1–25)

<sup>22</sup> Directive (EU) 2017/853 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (OJ L 137, 24.5.2017, p. 22-39)

<sup>23</sup> Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova

<sup>24</sup> Council document 10726/21

**Objective 4: Stepping up international cooperation** to better exchange information and cooperate between EU and non-EU countries to reduce the proliferation of firearms in our neighbourhood, thus increasing the security within the EU.

*Scope - activities and outcomes*

Proposals under this topic must carry out the activities below or reach the following outcomes:

Objective 1: activities and outcomes could be organising meetings and workshops, conducting research studies with a special focus on 3D printed weapons, new technologies, the conversion of weapons under the scope of the Firearms Directive (specially alarm and signal weapons and salute and acoustic weapons) and assessing threats posed by weapons currently out of the scope of the Firearms Directive, drafting policy recommendations, developing IT applications (specifically national registries of firearms or the digitalisation of the European Firearms Pass), reference tables of brands and models of firearms, forensic tests, and surveys, among others. Proposals should take into considerations case studies from law enforcement agencies and judicial actors. Proposals could also support the Commission in evaluating the fit for purpose of the current legislation and operational activities.

Objective 2: activities and outcomes could be to organising coordination meetings to support the Member States in the creation or update of national IT systems designed to store data on seized firearms and promoting the harmonisation of data and interconnections at EU level. This harmonisation should target as many Member States as possible. Other potential activities are meetings and workshops, or conducting research studies on gun violence across the EU and putting forward initiatives to create national statistics sets focused on measuring its impact in our society. Proposals aiming to develop real-time tracking tools for firearms-related incidents and seizures across the EU and non-EU countries will be deemed relevant as well.

Objective 3: activities and outcomes could include field visits and trainings for Member States as well as operational and capacity-building activities linked to national firearms focal points. Activities could also include a harmonised development of IT systems and operational activities such as joint action days, cyber-patrolling operations, developing or testing new technologies to support law enforcement agencies and supporting of investigations.

Activities focused on the improvement of the exchange of ballistic information should support the establishment of a common platform at EU level compatible with the X3P format. Examples of activities could be meetings, tests, development of protocols or establishment of IT-systems. These proposals should include information-sharing with EUROPOL and activities in the framework of the EU firearms intelligence hub in the EU Agency. Proposals should target Member States and international organisations which are using different automatic ballistic information systems or focus on investigating and testing new technologies which can support law enforcement agencies in their daily practical work regarding investigations and controls on firearms trafficking.

Objective 4: activities and outcomes could include operational and strategic meetings to plan transnational actions such as joint operations, and cross-border operational law enforcement cooperation.

The focus should be on increasing the capacity of non-EU countries to deal with all aspects of firearms control and on fostering the development of common standards to

enable police officers to cooperate effectively, within the limits set out in Union law. Under objective 4, proposals must have as co-beneficiary at least one of the non-EU countries included in the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking, i.e., Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo<sup>25</sup>), MENA region<sup>26</sup>, Türkiye, Ukraine or Moldova.

### *Expected impact*

Objective 1: enhanced knowledge of current, emerging, and future threats regarding the misuse and trafficking of firearms and increased effectiveness of the implementation of the Firearms Directive.

Objective 2: improved intelligence picture on the threat of firearms, through the establishment of a harmonised collection of data on seized firearms and the exchange of information, including the provision of information to the Commission to better address the threats. Enhanced knowledge at EU level of the impact of gun violence in the European society is expected as well.

Objective 3: strengthened National Firearms Focal Points' capacities to better fulfil their tasks, increased exchange of information and increased quantity and quality of the reports issued.

Enhanced capabilities of Member States to exchange ballistic information using the standard X3P, including automatic exchange of ballistic information among automatic ballistic systems of different providers and formats.

Enhanced law enforcement's capacity to use these new technologies in their daily work, thanks to new technologies having been tested and developed.

Objective 4: increased capacity of EU and non-EU countries to counter firearms trafficking, promotion of the standardisation and harmonisation of national legislation and procedures with the body of EU legislation and EU operational procedures. Also, a decrease of proliferation of firearms in all beneficiaries' countries.

### *Additional considerations applicable to this call*

Proposals aligned with the goals and actions of the EMPACT Firearms and including Member States with roles of driver, co-drivers or action leaders in the EMPACT firearms will be deemed particularly relevant, as well as proposals including cooperation and interaction with EUROPOL, FRONTEX or CEPOL (depending on the objectives addressed by the proposal).

## **Protection against explosives threats with detection dogs**

### *Objectives*

This topic aims to contribute to the creation of certification tools and trainings to enhance the capacities of detection dogs in the EU to detect explosives, firearms and precursors. Such certifications and trainings must comply with the existing EU

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<sup>25</sup> All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions, or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo

<sup>26</sup> Morocco, Albania, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen

detection standards and the EU guidance for detection dogs' deployment methodology<sup>27</sup>. These certifications must also ensure that the explosive detection dog teams meet the EU voluntary detection standards<sup>28</sup> before being deployed in the different public protection security missions. Certification must cover public areas and critical infrastructure (except aviation, which is already covered by Regulation 300/2008).

### *Scope - activities and outcomes*

Proposals under this topic must carry out the activities below or reach the following outcomes:

- Establish certification capacity(ies), in compliance with EU recommendations for certification and dog detection standards, with facilities simulating public areas (stadia, transport hubs, etc.) where certification activities can be offered to dog teams (private and public entities using dogs) and Member States authorities for detecting explosive threats and firearms.
- Implement and roll-out, in compliance with existing EU Recommendations for dog detection standards and EU guidance for detection dogs' deployment methodology, certification procedures for different operational areas where detection dogs are used in public areas (e.g., rail and maritime transportation, sport and cultural venues, buildings and shopping centres).
- Establish an EU training capacity facility, taking into account relevant EU documents and outputs (e.g., EU recommendations on training and selection, EU recommendations for Standard Operation Procedures), and a pool of trained experts with knowledge of the EU certification requirements for detection of threats in public areas by dogs. The training capacity should include the ongoing EU explosive dog demining training initiative and training activities linked with the EU-Ukraine programme<sup>29</sup>.

The main target group of this topic would be the public authorities and private entities (operators, private security companies, etc.) who voluntarily request support on the certification or training activities of dogs for the protection of public spaces, public events, and critical infrastructures. Beneficiaries of the training capacity would be also the parties involved in the EU-Ukraine demining dog programme.

### *Expected impact*

The creation of training certifications available to public and private detection dog teams that can certify/approve on behalf of the Member State authorities responsible for the use of detection dogs in public areas.

### *Additional considerations applicable to this topic*

Proposals should be aligned with the ongoing EU actions on setting voluntary detection standards for security equipment and detection dogs.

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<sup>27</sup> [PROTECTION OF PUBLIC SPACES - EU Guidance on Operating Procedures for Explosive Detection Dogs in Public Spaces \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Commission Recommendation on voluntary EU performance requirements for metal detection equipment used in public spaces.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> [EU mine detection dogs for Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#)



(EUROCAE), FRONTEX, European Defence Fund (EDF) projects and the Law Enforcement Networks Working Group.

- Conducting real-time analysis of drone incidents and feeding this data into the EC digital platform developed by JRC containing information on drone incidents.
- Setting up consultation workshops with the C-UAS industry and with relevant C-UAS standardization stakeholders, to promote a formal full standardization of test methods and data formats for counter-drones, based upon the work performed by previous EU funded projects.
- Developing a mapping of the different existing regulatory measures in the EU related to the use of counter drone systems to support the counter drone expert group.
- Conducting performance testing of suitable individual sensors and integrated systems.

Target groups are first and foremost the EU Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). However, given the nature of this subject, dual use applications, i.e., the use of C-UAS system for end-users in the defence domain, should be considered as well.

In terms of target countries, the counter-drone systems considered (for desk analysis or real testing) should be commercially available in the European Union and legal for use by law enforcement and other competent authorities to ensure relevance to the maximum number of stakeholders in the Member States.

#### *Expected impact*

The following impacts are expected:

- The establishment of a harmonized testing methodology for counter-drone systems, considering previous EU-funded projects
- The implementation of a mapping of the existing regulatory needs in the use of the counter drone systems in the EU
- An increased awareness of the capabilities and performance of counter-drone systems among the EU LEAs
- The establishment of a dialogue with industry operators to accept the identified standards for counter-drone systems testing
- An increased cost-efficiency of counter-drone solution testing, through synchronization of the awarded projects outcomes with individual Member States and relevant stakeholders' initiatives, to develop a multi-agency and multi-national approach
- Counter-drone stakeholders (policymakers, LEAs, industry, research community) are well-integrated.

#### *Additional considerations applicable to this topic*

Proposals including EU LEAs as co-applicants within their consortium will be considered as particularly relevant.

Proposals including cooperation with CEN (the European Committee for Standardization) and CENELEC (the European Electrotechnical Committee for

Standardization) to work towards a full standardisation of counter-drone testing, will be deemed particularly relevant.

Proposals must describe how they intend to share information, including potentially sensitive testing data, with all key stakeholders in the Member States, as well as how they intend to use the information channels available through the Commission’s secure communications infrastructure.

**For all topics:**

The European Commission welcomes proposals with broad geographical scope engaging applicants from diverse regions across the EU.

The European Commission welcomes proposals involving applicants from more Member States than the minimum number identified in the eligibility criteria, as long as they are relevant for the design of the action.

Considering that the successful implementation of the EU Action Plan to support the protection of public spaces requires cooperation between public and private actors, project proposals submitted by a consortium composed of public and private entities would be considered particularly relevant (this statement does not apply to the topic on firearms).

**3. Available budget**

The available call budget is **EUR 30 000 000**. Specific budget information per topic can be found below:

Topic	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection against chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) threats in public spaces</li> <li>• Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms</li> <li>• Protection against explosives threats with detection dogs</li> <li>• Protection against potential threats posed by non-cooperative drones</li> <li>• Protection of places of worship, schools, and community gatherings</li> </ul>	<p>EUR 25 000 000</p>
<p>Protection of Jewish places of worship, schools, and community gatherings</p>	<p>EUR 5 000 000</p>

We reserve the right not to award all available funds, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

#### 4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	21 December 2023
Opening for submission:	8 February 2024
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>4 April 2024 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	April – June 2024
Information on evaluation results:	June-August 2024 <sup>32</sup>
GA signature:	September/October 2024

#### 5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (see *timetable section 4*).

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
  - **list of previous projects** (key projects for the last 4 years, not limited to EU-funded projects): template available in Part B but to be **submitted as a separate annex**<sup>33</sup>.

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover, you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated

<sup>32</sup> In the interest of equal treatment of applicants, the Commission cannot provide any information on the outcome of the call for proposals before the official announcement of the results.

<sup>33</sup> The list of previous projects is a mandatory annex. In case this annex is not uploaded, the application will be considered inadmissible and will not be assessed.

entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable, accessible and printable**.

Proposals are limited to maximum **50 pages** (Part B without annexes). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents (*for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc*).

 For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the [Online Manual](#).

## 6. Eligibility

### Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs)), excluding Denmark<sup>34</sup>,
  - non-EU countries<sup>35</sup>:
    - legal entities established in a selection of non-EU countries can participate only under the topics “Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms” and “Protection against explosives threats with detection dogs”. Such entities must apply as co-beneficiaries and as part of a consortium composed of at least 3 independent legal entities, each of which should be established in a different EU Member State. For the topic on firearms, participating non-EU countries can only be those included in the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking (see section 2 above) and for the topic on detection dogs, the only eligible third country is Ukraine.
    - under the objective 4 ‘Stepping up international cooperation’ of the topic ‘Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms’, proposals are requested to include as co-beneficiary at least one of the non-EU countries included in the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking.

Profit-making entities must be part of a consortium where public authorities are partners too.

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

<sup>34</sup> In accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of Protocol No 22 on the position of Denmark, annexed to the TEU and to the TFEU, Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2021/1149 and is not bound by it or subject to its application.

<sup>35</sup> A non-EU country is a country, which is not an EU Member State.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc (*see section 13*).

### *Specific cases*

**Natural persons** — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e., sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person).

**International organisations** — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them. International organisations can participate as co-beneficiaries (not as coordinators) regardless of their geographical location. However, being based in an eligible country does not contribute to the fulfilment of the minimum number of eligible countries required in the eligibility criteria related to the consortium composition.

**Entities without legal personality** — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons<sup>36</sup>.

**EU bodies** — EU bodies can NOT be part of the consortium.

**Associations and interest groupings** — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'<sup>37</sup>. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

**Countries currently negotiating association agreements** — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations (*see list above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

**EU restrictive measures** — Special rules apply for certain entities (e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)<sup>38</sup> and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)<sup>39</sup>). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

### *Impact of the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506 of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union Budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary.*

Following the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16th December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed

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<sup>36</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>37</sup> For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>38</sup> Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

<sup>39</sup> Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021<sup>40</sup> or any entity they maintain.

Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

### Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by:

- minimum 3 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 3 different EU Member States, including overseas countries and territories (OCTs), excluding Denmark.
- the following entities can NOT apply as coordinator:
  - international organisations<sup>41</sup>, irrespective of their country of establishment;
  - entities established in non-EU countries.

### Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

### Other important considerations

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes, including but not limited to, under [Horizon](#). The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects should comply with EU policy interests and priorities (such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc).

### Duration

Projects must have a maximum duration of **36 months** (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

### Maximum EU Grant amount

Requested EU contribution to the project's budget ("maximum EU grant amount" per project) must range between EUR 500.000 and EUR 3.000.000, except for the topic "Protection of Jewish places of worship, schools and community gatherings", where the requested EU contribution must be between EUR 500.000 and 5.000.0000.

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<sup>40</sup> As Act IX of 2021 can be amended, the applicants should always refer to the latest update of the relevant Hungarian Act, available in the national legal database NJT.hu (<https://njt.hu>).

<sup>41</sup> The term "international organisations" is used as defined in Article 156 of the FR (Euratom 2018/1046);

### Ethics

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards
- EU values based on Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and
- other applicable EU, international and national law.

Applications should pay appropriate attention to the effects of the project on individual rights and freedoms, and indicate the measures taken to limit or remedy such effects.

Applicants must show in their application that they respect ethical principles and EU values based on Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Projects involving ethics issues may be made subject to specific ethics rules.

### Security

Projects involving EU classified information must undergo security scrutiny to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in a security aspects letter (SAL) which is annexed to the Grant Agreement).

These rules (governed by Decision [2015/444](#)<sup>42</sup> and its implementing rules and/or national rules) provide for instance that:

- projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or equivalent) can NOT be funded
- classified information must be marked in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the SAL
- information with classification levels CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/ EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may be:
  - created or accessed only on premises with facility security clearing (FSC) from the competent national security authority (NSA), in accordance with the national rules
  - handled only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA
  - accessed and handled only by persons with valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and a need-to-know
- at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continue to be protected in accordance with the applicable rules
- action tasks involving EU classified information (EUCI) may be subcontracted only with prior written approval from the granting authority and only to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission)

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<sup>42</sup> See Commission Decision 2015/544/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

- disclosure of EUCI to third parties is subject to prior written approval from the granting authority.

Please note that, depending on the type of activity, facility security clearing may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearing in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. Please note that in no circumstances can we sign any grant agreement until at least one of the beneficiaries in a consortium has facility security clearing.

Beneficiaries must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third-country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grant (*e.g., technology restrictions, national security classification, etc*). The granting authority must be notified immediately of any potential security issues.

Overview table of Eligibility conditions

<b><u>For all topics</u></b>	
<b>Consortium composition – minimum number of</b>	
Entities	3
Member States participating in ISF <sup>43</sup>	3
<b>Consortium composition – participation of public bodies (*) is always eligible as coordinator or beneficiary</b>	
<b>Consortium composition – participation of private entities as</b>	
Coordinators	YES
Beneficiaries	YES
<b>Consortium composition – International Organisations can participate as (**)</b>	
Coordinators	NO
Beneficiaries	YES
<b>Consortium composition – participation of profit-making entities as (***)</b>	
Coordinators	YES
Beneficiaries	YES
<b>EU Grant amount per project (Requested EU contribution)</b>	
Minimum (EUR)	500 000
Maximum (EUR)	For the topic " <b>Protection of Jewish places of worship, schools and community gatherings</b> " the maximum requested EU contribution is 5 000 000. For all the other topics it is 3 000 000.

<sup>43</sup> [ISF Eligible countries](#)

<b>Duration of projects (in months)</b>	
Maximum 36 months	
<b>For topics</b> <b>“Protection against the misuse and trafficking of firearms”</b> <b>and</b> <b>“Protection against explosives threats with detection dogs”</b>	
<b>Consortium composition — participation of legal entities established in non-EU countries</b>	
Coordinators	NO
Beneficiaries	YES (****)

(\*) Public bodies or, by the competent authority’s mandate, a public or non-public implementing agency or body of a Member State participating in the ISF.

(\*\*) The rules on eligible countries do not apply to international organisations. International organisations can participate as co-beneficiaries regardless of their geographical location. However, being based in an eligible country does not contribute to the fulfilment of the minimum number of eligible countries required in the eligibility criteria related to the consortium composition.

(\*\*\*) Profit-making entities must be part of a consortium where there are public authorities as partners too.

(\*\*\*\*) Legal entities established in a selection of non-EU countries (see section 2 above) can participate as co-beneficiaries only as part of a consortium composed of at least three independent legal entities, each of which must be established in three different EU Member States (except Denmark<sup>44</sup>).

## 7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

### Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation (*e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc*). The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including

<sup>44</sup> [ISF eligible countries](#)

local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations

- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
  - an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)
  - prefinancing paid in instalments
  - (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (*see below, section 10*)
- or
- propose no prefinancing
  - request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

### Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years).

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Public bodies, Member State organisations and international organisations are exempted from the operational capacity check.

### Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate<sup>45</sup>:

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<sup>45</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>46</sup> (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that<sup>47</sup>:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

## 8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will have to follow a **two-step evaluation procedure**.

For all eligible applications, in the first step, there will be a pre-selection on the basis of the Relevance award criterion only. In the second step, the successful proposals will be assessed against the full set of award criteria.

An **evaluation committee** will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, see *sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated (for each topic) against the operational

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<sup>46</sup> Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

<sup>47</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

capacity and award criteria (see sections 7 and 9) and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- 1) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'.
- 2) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call.
- 3) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc.*

**Grant preparation** will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

## 9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

- **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of the objectives and scope of the project seen against the objectives and expected impact/outcomes (if applicable) as identified in section 2; contribution to the relevant EU strategic documents and/or action plans and legislative context; previous results in the field; European/trans-national dimension (30 points)
- **Quality:** logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed; methodology for implementing the project (concept and

methodology, timetable, monitoring and evaluation); expertise and quality of the consortium and project teams; management structures and procedures; risks and risk management; feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness and best value for money (50 points)

- **Impact:** expected short-term and long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; degree of ambition and innovation; appropriate communication strategy, including visibility of EU funding; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends; replicability/usability/potential for amplification of the results (20 points).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	21	30
Quality	n/a	50
Impact	n/a	20
<b>Overall (pass) scores</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds for the criterion 'Relevance': 21/30 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual threshold for the criterion 'Relevance' AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

## 10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on [Portal Reference Documents](#).

### Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Maximum project duration: 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

### KPIs, milestones and deliverables

Project proposals should provide key performance indicators (KPIs), both qualitative and quantitative, with baseline and targets to be used to monitor the implementation

and to assess the result of the project, as well as measure the outputs and results of the project against programme performance indicators, relevant to the action, included in Annex VIII of Regulation (EU) ISF: 2021/1149, in particular as regards the Specific Objectives stated in Article 3.

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- A mid-term progress report,
- Key performance indicators report

#### Form of grant, funding rate and maximum EU grant amount

The grant parameters (*maximum EU grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.*) will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5*).

Maximum EU Grant amount per project (Requested EU contribution): *see section 6 above*. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (**90%**).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e., surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3 of Model Grant Agreement*).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement (*e.g., improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc.*).

#### Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2*).

*Budget categories for this call:*

- A. Personnel costs
  - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
  - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
  - A.5 Volunteers
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
  - C.1 Travel and subsistence
  - C.2 Equipment
  - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories (*not applicable*)

- E. Indirect costs

*Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:*

- personnel costs:
  - SME owner/natural person unit cost<sup>48</sup>: Yes
  - volunteers unit cost<sup>49</sup>: Yes (without indirect costs)
- travel and subsistence unit cost<sup>50</sup>: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation + full cost for listed equipment
- other cost categories:
  - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- divers:
  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. cannot be declared as cost

 **Volunteers costs** — Volunteers costs are not a classic cost category. There are no costs because volunteers work for free, but they may nonetheless be added to the budget in the form of a pre-fixed unit cost (per volunteer) and thus allow you to benefit from the volunteers' work for the grant (by increasing the amount of reimbursement up to 100% of the normal costs, i.e. cost categories other than volunteers). More information is available in the [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.A.5](#).

*Reporting and payment arrangements*

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22*).

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **80%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments**.

In addition, you will be expected to submit one or more progress reports not linked to payments.

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<sup>48</sup> Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7715).

<sup>49</sup> Commission [Decision](#) of 10 April 2019 authorising the use of unit costs for declaring personnel costs for the work carried out by volunteers under an action or a work programme (C(2019)2646).

<sup>50</sup> Commission [Decision](#) C(2023)4928 of 26 July 2023 amending the Commission Decision C(2021)35 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35).

**Payment of the balance:** At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

 Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement (see *art 22*).

Please also note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

### Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement.

### Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

### Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

### Provisions concerning the project implementation

Security rules: see *Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14 and Annex 5)*

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5):*

- rights of use on results: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5):*

- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes
- limited communication and visibility to protect persons involved: No

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and Annex 5):*

- EU restrictive measures: Yes
- durability: Yes
- specific rules for humanitarian actions: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

#### Other specificities

n/a

#### Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).

 For more information, see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

### **11. How to submit an application**

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a **2-step process**:

#### **a) create a user account and register your organisation**

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to [create an EU Login user account](#).

Once you have an EU Login account, you can [register your organisation](#) in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

#### **b) submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** (*see section 5*); excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the [IT Helpdesk webform](#), explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the [Online Manual](#). The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

## 12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- [Online Manual](#)
- FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions).

Questions **received later than 7 calendar days before the deadline** for submitting applications will not be answered. In the interest of equal treatment of applicants, the Commission cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants or actions.

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

### Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: [HOME-ISF@ec.europa.eu](mailto:HOME-ISF@ec.europa.eu).

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates (*see cover page*).

## 13. Important

### IMPORTANT

- **Don't wait until the end** — Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions (*e.g. congestion, etc*) will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System** — By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the [Portal Terms & Conditions](#).
- **Registration** — Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the [Participant Register](#). The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles** — When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).  
Organisations may participate in several proposals.  
BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).
- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced, or the entire proposal will be rejected.
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see *section 12*).

- **Transparency** — In accordance with Article 38 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the [Europa website](#).

This includes:

- beneficiary names
- beneficiary addresses
- the purpose for which the grant was awarded
- the maximum amount awarded.

The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection** — The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the [Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement](#).